

Unity in God's Army: *Teamwork and Conflict Resolution*

²⁵ *If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*
– Mark 3:25

³ *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*
– Ephesians 4:3

Are you a “Team Player?”

Many of us, in spite of being mature Christians, prefer to work as “lone rangers” rather than in collaboration with others.



Let's ask ourselves the following questions:

- *Do you have a hard time sharing projects with others?*
- *Does it bother you when you do not receive public recognition for things you do?*
- *Do you feel neglected and hurt when others receive recognition?*
- *Does it bother you when others excel in similar gifts or ministries to your own?*
- *Do you feel a secret satisfaction when another person fails?*
- *When another person fails, do you share the news with others?*
- *Do you have a hard time working behind the scenes?*
- *Do you feel bad when another person in your ministry has gifts that excel yours?*

Perhaps you need to learn more about working together with others!

Our Goal in this class is to learn more about how to serve God in unity and collaboration with others, focusing on personal repentance and strategies for conflict resolution.

Obstacles to Unity

- **Independence and Pride – “The Lone Ranger” Syndrome**
- **Jealousy and Competition – “The Princess” Syndrome**
- **Poor conflict resolution skills – “The Porcupine” Syndrome**

Obstacle #1

Independence and Pride: *The Lone Ranger Syndrome*

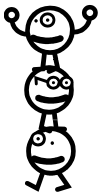
The Lone Ranger fails to understand...

- *That we need one another in the Body of Christ (Interdependence)*
- *That we are called to work together with others*



Christians are by nature “Interdependent” – We need one another!

Interdependence = Mutual need



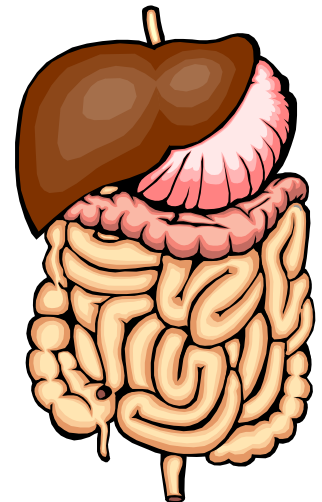
There is simply no alternative! If we are true believers, we *must* have unity with other believers. In Christ we become members of a family, and whether we like it or not, *family is family!* Scripture also teaches that Christians are “the body of Christ.” Just as an arm or a kidney has no other choice; neither do we. We are connected to the other members of the body, or we die!! We cannot “opt out” of sharing with other believers. As Christians, *we are stuck with one another!*”

We are members of One Body: Eyes and Intestines!



¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by^a one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. **1 Corinthians 12:12-20**



Consider the following two members of a body: *Eyes and intestines*. How could the eyes easily consider themselves to be more valuable than the intestines?

On the contrary, how could one argue that the intestines are in fact more important to the functioning of the body than the eyes?

Likewise in the church, how can we easily evaluate the importance of certain people or roles in incorrect ways?

The Call to “Teamwork”

Pick a team sport – football, baseball, basketball, water polo..etc.

In this sport, what are some characteristics of a poor “team-mate?”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



In that same sport, mention some qualities of a good “team player.”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Jesus- The Perfect Team Player

Read Philippians 2:1-18

Based on this text, mention five qualities of a good “team player.”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Competition is great – but not against our own team mates!!

*³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **Philippians 2:3***

Note down an example of acting out of “competition or self promotion” in the context of church life and ministry.

Obstacle to Unity #2 Jealousy and Competition: The Princess

The Princess fails to understand...

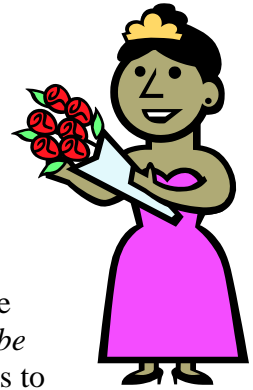
- *That life is not a beauty contest or competition*
- *That the success of others does not lessen her*
- *We “win” in life when we help others to “win” as well!*



Is life a Beauty Contest?

Jealousy – a symptom of fear and insecurity

Many of us live as if everything in life were a competition against others. Appearance, possessions, position – even prayer and spirituality, can become the stuff of competition!! Rather than be satisfied with our own progress, we must *be better* than others! We experience envy and jealousy, as if all others are enemies to be “beaten,” because their success takes something precious away from us!



Examples

- A three year old child feels displaced and jealous of a newborn sibling
- A worship leader feels jealous of the new member with a beautiful voice.
- A Christian with a prophetic gifting feels rivalry with another church member who begins to receive accurate revelations...etc.

In each case we observe *fear and personal insecurity*.



Satan’s Lie: *If the other wins, I lose!*

A Kingdom Mentality: *We are on the same team! His success is my success!*

*We worship a God of abundance!*⁹ The success of another in no way lowers or lessens me as a person, loved and called by God in my own way. We play for the same team – we fight in the same army against a common enemy – Satan himself. When my teammate scores a goal, or my fellow soldier makes a heroic conquest, I rejoice with him!



Example – The Disciples were envious of other followers of Jesus

³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” ³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. **Mark 9:38-40**

Why does John desire to stifle others who cast out demons?

How do we observe the same kind of dynamic among churches and Christians now?

⁹ Covey speaks of an “abundance mentality.” **Seven Habits...**

Moses – There’s enough anointing to go around! God is a God of Abundance!

If another brother or sister receives a special anointing, does this mean that you become somehow less important? We observe how Moses responded when two men, Eldad and Medad, were anointed and prophesied separately from Moses and the larger group.

²⁶ However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” ²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”

²⁹ But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” **Numbers 11:26-29**

Why does Joshua want to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying?

How is Moses’ perspective entirely different from Joshua’s?

John the Baptist – “He must increase, and I must decrease...”

Read John 3:22-30

Why are the disciples of John worried?

How does John respond? How could he have responded?

To what does John the Baptist compare himself in relation to Jesus?

Imagine a comparable situation in the life of our church. What might be a situation in the ministry of the church that could arouse jealousy between brothers and require that we demonstrate the humility and attitude of John the Baptist to cultivate peace?

The Call to lift up our brothers

Barnabus – “Son of Encouragement”

Barnabus understood that as Christians we serve on the same team – that we win when we help others to succeed. Consider how Barnabus helped *others* to be more successful than himself.



The Case of Saul – The Art of giving someone a chance

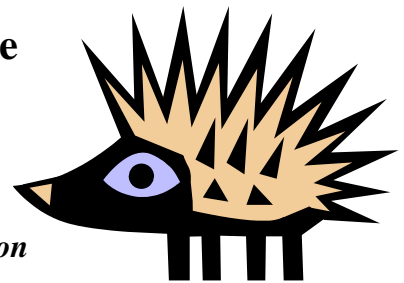
When Saul accepted Christ, everyone rejected him as a former persecutor of the church... except Barnabus!!

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. Acts 9:26-27

How is the reaction of the apostles towards Saul understandable? How do we observe the character of Barnabus on display in this incident?

Think of your own life. Are you a Barnabus? Have you helped a new person in the gospel to become involved, grow, and perhaps become more influential in the church than yourself? Share the story? What happened?

Obstacle to Unity #3 – The Porcupine Syndrome Inability to Resolve Conflicts



The Porcupine fails to understand...

- *That it is possible to resolve a conflict in a constructive fashion*
- *How to go about the process of resolving a conflict*
- *How to dialog effectively with those who have a different perspective*

Cultivating Unity takes Work!

“...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3

What does the word “eager” mean for you? _____

Cultivating Unity requires a Peace-making attitude

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1-6

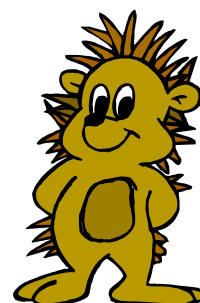
According to these verses, what are some necessary *attitudes* for cultivating unity?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

“Bear with one another in love” = Tolerance! We “tolerate” things that annoy us! Mention an example of something in another church member which you are learning to tolerate!

Cultivating Unity Takes Hard Work

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:25-32



Based on these verses, mention five ways to cultivate unity between brothers and sisters.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Of these, which is most difficult for you?

_____.

The Call to Resolve Conflict

In any team, family or army, internal conflict is inevitable. A mature Christians learns how to resolve such conflicts wisely and according to Biblical principles.

*²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. **Matthew 5:23-24***

According to this verse, which is more urgent in the life of a believer, worshiping God or seeking reconciliation with an offended brother? Why?

Read Matthew 18:15-20 – Steps in Conflict Resolution

According to this text, list three critical steps in the process of reconciliation.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We generally fail to follow these steps in their proper order. On the contrary, we manage conflict in exactly the opposite order of action steps than that which Jesus teaches. Generally, what is the first thing people do when in conflict with another?

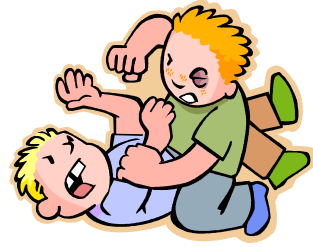
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Four Styles in Resolving Differences¹⁰

Observe which way you generally use when in conflict with others.

1. Dominate: *I win – You lose* (Dominant Donald)

One can “win” an argument, but lose a relationship. We quash dissent and inflict divisions in the body. We become increasingly hardened, proud, and embittered.



2. Yield: *You win – I lose* (Amiable Amanda)

Some of us are simply too nice. We desire to avoid disappointing anyone and thus seek “peace at all costs.” We allow ourselves to be trampled by others as human “doormats.” While this strategy may seem more “humble” and Christian, in fact it can hamper unity and cause deeper problems in the long run. This person tends to sweep problems under the carpet and internalize anger, rather than resolve important differences. This “stuffing” process can produce bitterness, depression and passive aggressive attempts to sabotage the efforts of others in indirect ways.



Of course, at times this strategy is necessary and prudent. We must “choose our battles,” and yield in matters which do not merit our efforts, but generally this strategy does not produce relational health in the body of Christ.

3. Vengeance: *I lose – You lose* (Vengeful Vladimir)

Satan models this style quite well. Knowing that he is destined hellish destruction, he seeks to drag down as many others as possible with him out of sheer spite. On a lighter note, some sports fans feel relief if their hated rival loses, even if their own team also loses. In human conflicts as well, sometimes we do not care if we suffer, *as long as the other suffers as well!*



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¹⁰ From Stephen Covey: [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#). Adapted.



4. Resolve: *I win – You win* (Winsome Winfred)

In Christ, we can find solutions that meet the legitimate needs of both parties. *Both can “win!”* This strategy takes into account the needs of both parties. It requires effort, imagination, and emotional maturity!

- *Listening skills*: Genuinely hear the views of the other without interrupting
- *Empathy*: Put yourself in the other’s position
- *Understanding*: Truly grasp the perspective and needs of the other person
- *Courage*: Express your own perspective in a clear, respectful way
- *Creativity*: Seek solutions together that meet the legitimate needs of both parties

An Example from the First Church – The Greek Widows v. the Hebrew Widows

Read Acts 6:1-7 Describe the problem.

What are the legitimate needs of the Greek widows?

What are the needs of the apostles?

How was this problem resolved in a way that filled the needs of all parties?

If they had solved this problem in this positive way, what could have happened? What could have been the negative consequences of their failure to resolve this conflict well?

Rules (Guidelines) for a Fair Fight - (A “Fair Fight”)

Words are not easily retracted – Like tooth paste!

A Christian camp counselor once led a group of kids in the following didactic game. He gave each one a small tube of toothpaste and asked them to squeeze the sticky paste out into their hands. Of course, the messy fun inspired laughter and squeals of delight! But then came the assignment: Return the toothpaste into the tube! Obviously no one could completely force all the paste back into the tube, but they certainly enjoyed the chance to smear and squeeze the stickiness all over themselves!



Our words are much the same! Once spoken, it is extremely difficult to take them back, and we usually make the mess worse! Therefore, we do well to take time to consider certain guidelines or “rules for a fair fight” which can help us resolve conflicts without inflicting lasting damage to the relationship.

Rules for a “Fair Fight”

- Give the benefit of the doubt
- Assume good faith
- Focus on specific, concrete issues
- Do not accuse the person of malicious motives
- Seek to understand the perspective of the other person
- Remember that you are both on the same team, ultimately
- Don’t interrupt
- Don’t dominate the discussion
- Don’t speak when your blood pressure is high! Calm down before speaking
- Breathe
- Don’t try to resolve conflicts when you’re hungry or tired or in a hurry
- Speak *to* the person, not *about* them
- Avoid demonizing the person (exaggerating their wickedness!)
- Avoid subtle jabs
- Avoid passive aggression (“silent treatment” – “cold shoulder”)
- Don’t insult
- Don’t generalize, “*you always...*”
- Don’t interrupt
- Listen to the perspective of the other (repeating back their argument.)
- Use “*I feel*” rather than the more accusing, “*you always...*”
- Remember that there’s more to the situation than meets your eye
- Try to imagine how they feel – put yourself in their shoes
- Be self-aware – recognize how your own feelings of tiredness, insecurity, or frustration may be exaggerating your reactions
- Use “save draft” before pushing the “send” button on an email
- Focus on the problem, not the person

- Avoid including “baggage” from the past
- Don’t yell
- Don’t threaten
- Seek solutions rather than a person to “blame”
- Don’t trap a person – give them a way out.
- Don’t shame a person – protect their dignity
- Avoid bad words
- Don’t “stuff” anger until it explodes
- Don’t throw things
- *Never, never never, never* – use violence!

Of these guidelines, jot down three which are most difficult for you to follow when in conflict.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Above all

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Pe. 4:8

What does it mean that “*love covers over a multitude of sins?*”
